

Field Naturalists' Club

of Ballarat Inc

October 1999



***Viola hederacea* ... Ivy-leaf Violet**

From "All About Australian Bush Gardens",
by Maloney, Walker and Mullins.

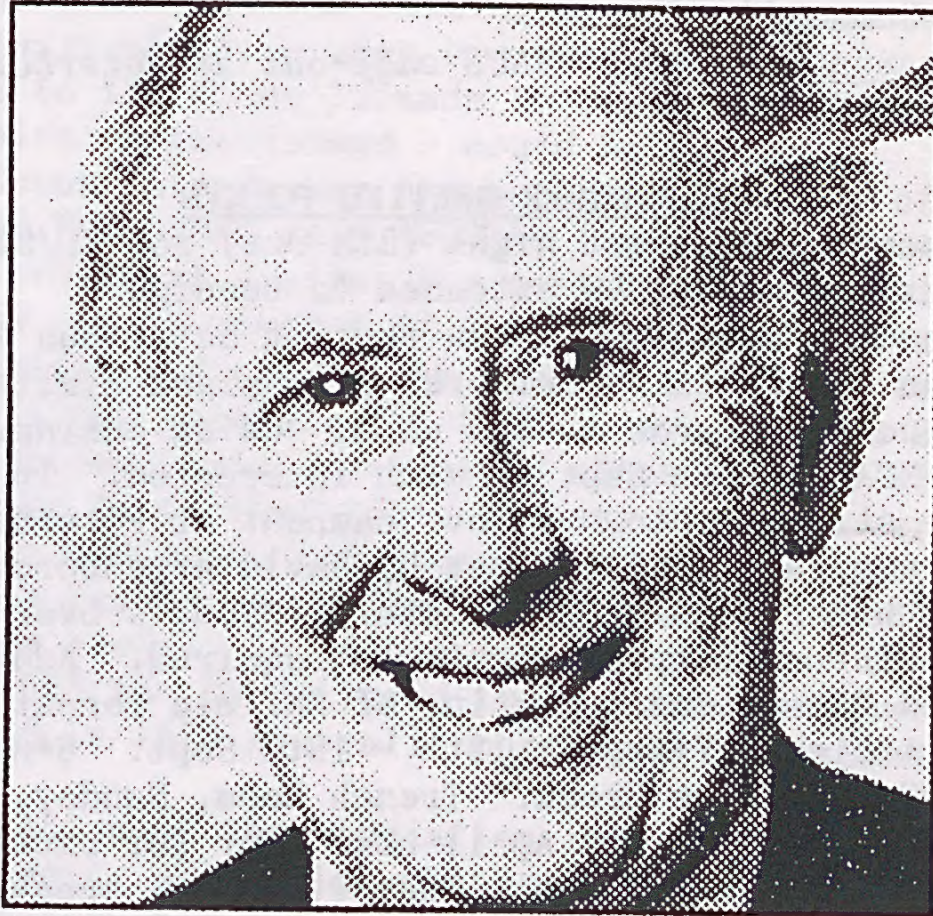
... One of many wildflowers seen on our Enfield excursion.
Enfield and Sunraysia reports next month.



Stella...friend and mentor to
many.

STELLA BEDGGOOD MEMORIAL LECTURE.

Insect Protection Mechanisms.
Presentation by John Landy MBE.



JOHN LANDY

In his childhood John collected butterflies - and his interest in nature has continued to this day.

In his twenties he became famous for his athletics achievements and sportsmanship.

Most of his professional life has been concerned with agriculture, including 11 years as Research and Development Manager of ICI Australia's Rural Division. He was a foundation member of the Land Conservation Council, and in 1984 was elected a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science. He became chairman of the Wool Research and Development Corporation in 1991.

He is currently producing excellent photography and has published two "Close To Nature" books. He recently helped to promote tree planting at Ravenswood as part of the Olympic Landcare Project. In March he was nominated in the Herald Sun as an "Australian of the Century".

DIARY DATES

Tues 12th Oct. *Bamganie Forest.* Leader Lyndsay Fink. Meet at Old Meredith PO at 10-00am.

Tues 19th Oct. *Committee Meeting.* 7-30pm, Pat and Bill's.

Fri 5th Nov, meeting. *Animals of East Africa.* Speaker Dr Frank Harrap.

Sun 7th Nov, excursion. *Barbara Williams' property, Talbot.* Leader Ken Hammond.

Fri 19th to Sun 21st Nov. *FNCB camp-out at Peterborough.* Leader Claire Dalman.

SEPTEMBER MEETING POINTS

1*Remember different night (8th Oct) for JL/SBML!

2*Sundays excursion can be extended to Bendigo -

Whirakee/Bendigo Wildflower Show running Sat & Sun 10-4.

3*Australian Naturalists' Network, logo signs available for town entry notice boards at \$40 each. Using echidna as symbol.

Reply to VFNCA by 30th Sept if club interested. Individuals can buy car stickers etc.

4*Nov. campout at Peterborough, 9 units were available. 5*Request by David Attenborough / BBC for help with forthcoming documentary, Mammals Over The World, 2 minute, point of interest sections required. Address given.

6*Claire and Pat attended meeting of Enfield Forest Alliance, newsletter tabled. 7*Angair 18th - 19th Sept. 8*Heritage

Week, ideas? -Yarrowee Creek. Trench Room, Sunday, by 13th Sept - representative? 2nd April next year for excursion.

8*Meeting at Garibaldi School, Thur 9th Sept, speakers Peter Griffiths - "History of The Yarrowee", and Tim D'Ombrian -

"LINCS program / Plants of the Yarrowee". All welcome, Joan and Brian Andrews attending. 9*Letter from Margaret Martin, in

sunny Queensland, they had 16" of rain in July! 10*Treasurer's Report, OK, first \$495 delivered for willow removal etc.

11*Remember please, help needed to set up room for SBML - arrive at 2pm - with native flowers etc.

FIELD REPORTS

A St Andrews cross spider with a perfect woven cross.

Next day two parts of the cross were missing, 21st Aug, Brisbane, Dulcie Brooke. Kookaburra visiting each day for four

weeks. Spinebills and red wattle-birds collecting wool to line their nests, Aug/Sept, Ballarat, Helen Burgess. Dragonflies

early, St Georges Lake and Hammen St Creswick, late August, Del McDonnell. Pair of chestnut teal on dam and Latham's snipe

near dam, Sept, Bungaree. Powerful owl and boobook owl, Warrack near Ararat, late Aug, (BOCB excursion), Les Hanrahan.

13 elegant parrots on same BOCB excursion, Ken Hammond. Mayfly orchids Enfield Forest. Fantailed cuckoos, Melton 14th Aug, Durham Lead 21st Aug, Brian Andrews. Plenty of good birds at Denilliquin, Claire Dalman. Claire also brought in a fine boronia specimen.

THE BOOBIES OF COCOS ISLAND.

Dr Barry Kentish was sitting in his office contemplating a cold Ballarat winter - when his phone rang, he was asked if he would go to the Cocos Islands to conduct a population study of the boobies on the island - could he refuse?

The Cocos Islands are the western-most part of Australia, 2700km NW of Perth and only 1000 km from Indonesia. They consist of two coral atolls, the northern one a National Park, the southern one consisting of 26 islands. The islands have a tropical climate and are in the cyclone zone, the temperature range is 18-32°C, rainfall 850-3300mm, evaporation 2000mm.

The northern island was named after Captain William Keeling of the Dutch East India Company who discovered it in 1609. The island group was named after the coconut tree *Cocis nucifera*. The Clunies-Ross family settled and owned the islands, they brought in Malays for cheap labour to produce copra. In 1955 the UN declared the islands Commonwealth Territory and in 1978 Australia purchased the island group for \$6.25M.

Integration of the population is now encouraged but by mutual agreement all of the whites it seems live on the SW corner of West Island and all of the Malays live on the NE corner. The airport is near the SW settlement, the airport terminal is also the town bar, which is very convenient - because it is also the town cyclone shelter! Many of the white "residents" seem to stay for two years, then move on; this at first seems strange but is easily explained as follows :- the first six months seem like heaven, faults are noticed and friends and family are missed in the next twelve months - and for the last six months they can't wait to get off the place!

Getting round to the boobies the dictionary definition of booby is "a dunce, a stupid fellow, a bird allied to the gannet ... so stupid that they could easily be killed with a stick!" Of course killing has been more efficient with guns.

The Cocos Malays are allowed to kill the boobies because the birds are native game and the Malays are now considered to be indigenous to the islands - there has to be some compensation for being used as slaves! The red-footed boobies are an additional protein source and also they have special

cultural significance - a booby on the dinner table is a bit like the christmas turkey for us whites! Hunting the boobies is also considered an important recreational pursuit. In the past harvest levels have varied from 100s to 32 000 pa. In the 1980s it became apparent to the Australian Government that unlimited harvesting was unsustainable, therefore a population study was started.

The study required stays on the northern island, where the boobies breed and which is a national park. It looked very pleasant, but is not set up for the average tourist, you have to swim the last 50m and the only accommodation is in igloo type huts salvaged from the Antarctic, needless to say they are stifling hot at night! One member of the group slept on the beach, trying to ignore the countless mosquitoes.

The number of birds was estimated by dividing the island up into transects and then counting the nests, eggs and chicks in a proportion of the transects. This gave the following results :- adult population about 23 200 pairs, adult mortality about 8%, fledgling success 10-70%, but what everyone really wanted to know was how many could be harvested - and I don't think anyone was game enough to produce an answer for that!

Barry also showed various pertinent slides including brown booby, hermit crab, white winged tern - sitting on an egg which was just balanced on a branch, frigate and lesser frigate birds etc.

An interesting and well presented talk!

Brian Andrews

FRYERSTOWN ...With Castlemaine FNC.

Sunday, 5th September. Eleven members departed from Ballarat. We drove through rain along Midland Highway to Guildford, met the leader Norma Dickerson and three other members from Castlemaine FNC at tennis courts adjacent to giant red gum. Eight people finger tip to finger tip to circumscribe the trunk, Claire calculated it to be 42 feet around the trunk. Rain had eased. We made off for Irishtown, we stopped at site of old hotel, nothing remains except majestic oak tree and two stelae, one in memory of Hannibal Richards of Hayle, Cornwall, died Feb 5th, 1855 aged 45 years and the other in memory of Robert Bamber died July 18th, 1854 aged 62 years, erected by his brother William. Incidentally July 18th the late Russell Mockridge's birthday (1928) - truly a man who lived life to the full. Norma evoked strange doings in the past when she told us we were adjacent to CHOKEM FLAT and MURDERER'S FLAT!

We set off along Great Dividing Trail, turned off at Petticoat Junction, made circuit back to GDT, took in extensive

stand of Pink Boronia, *B. anemonifolia* shrubs in bloom. Saw some rectangular and then some round (Chinese) mineshafts. Plants identified included Chinese Coffee Bush, Needle Bush (*Hakea*), Pink Fingers (Orchid), White Marianth, Red Box (*Eucalypt*), *Tetratheca* and Climbing Sundew.

We also observed a bull ant's nest and another ant species, with orange abdomens, Kevin Andrews found the nests under old iron. Calls of 3 cuckoos distinguished - Pallid (ascending notes), Fan-Tail (descending notes) and a Horsefields Bronze Cuckoo.

We adjourned to VAUGHAN MINERAL SPRINGS RESERVE for lunch, beside the Lodden River (substantial flow). Carol Hall befriended a superb blue wren and its harem by feeding crumbs - a delightful species plentiful at this location. Also observed were white throated tree creeper, grey fantail and mistletoe bird. Five walked to CENTRAL SPRINGS along a visitors' track. Then all headed home.

Tony Johns.

SEPTEMBER POSER ... T'WAS CROZZY TIME AGAIN !

While on the Fryerstown excursion Pat quietly told me that she had found BRACKEN in the grey squares.

OCTOBER POSER ... ROGER'S CONUNDRUM.

Most FNCB members, including myself, look forward to fellow member, Roger Thomas' "Nature Notes" in the Courier each week. Roger has done a tremendous service for the Ballarat community in general and naturalists in particular by tirelessly producing Nature Notes every week for a period of many years - ever since Jack Wheeler handed over.

I like to pop posers into the newsletter, which I like to think will force people to think about and debate nature topics. Roger is usually more of a gentleman and kindly provides lots of useful information, without expecting people to solve problems. However several months ago (14th Nov '98) Roger posed a problem concerning White-browed Wood-swallows. Unfortunately no solution was printed. We have decided to give the poser a rerun, surely an august group such as the FNCB can come up with a solution!

The problem, as printed in the Courier was :-

** Wood-swallow mystery*

Every spring the Ballarat region is visited by high-flying flocks of white-browed wood-swallows.

Traditionally first reported on the first spring day of hot north winds, the birds are usually in flocks of 20 to 100, and they are invariably flying north against the wind.

The first flock has passed over the district this year, but the mystery remains: when do they go south, and why do they fly against strong winds?

Whatever the answers might be, I shall always look forward to the thrilling sound of the high-flying migrating flocks, travelling in company against the hot north winds of November.

All theories will be gratefully received!

Roger Thomas / BDA

PS If they didn't call, I'd never know they were overhead.
Maybe they only call when flying north !!

RT

BLACK SWAN STUDY AT LAKE WENDOUREE.

Ken Kraaijeveld & Raoul Mulder.

We intend to learn more about three key aspects of black swan biology:-

1. Breeding success and the mating system.
2. Population dynamics and movements.
3. Habitat requirements.

Lake Wendouree birds are currently being banded and a considerable amount of data is being collected from captured birds. To construct life-histories of the birds marked for this study, your help is requested. If you see one of these birds, please read the inscription on the plastic leg band and send this to the address below, along with site and the date of the sighting and any other information that might be useful, such as breeding activity. The code on the bands consists of one letter and two numbers (read from top to bottom). Remember that all sightings are valuable, including those of the same bird at the same site for prolonged periods of time.

Send sightings to;

Ken Kraaijeveld	Ph:
Dept. of Zoology	Fax:
University of Melbourne	Email:
Parkville, Vic. 3052	

Spectators / helpers welcome

Ken Kraaijeveld per BDA

-----***----- FNCB -----***-----

Meetings are held at the Ballarat Horticulture centre, corner of Gregory and Gillies Streets, ie. the NW corner of the Botanic Gardens, VICROADS 254 F8, commencing at 7-30pm

Excursions depart from Creswick Plaza, VICROADS 255 M10, at 9-30 am, unless specified otherwise.

Committee; Claire Dalman (President).. , Greg Binns (Vice President).. , Pat Murphy (Secretary).. , John Gregurke (Treasurer).. , Brian Andrews (Editor).. , Helen Burgess, Maureen Christie, Lyndsay Fink, Carol Hall, John Mildren.

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